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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the problem of sexual harassment in industry. Prior research documenting such harassment is cited, and the ability of the counseling profession to address the issue is discussed. Results of the authors' survey of salaried women (N=85) from a large industrial firm are reported; the demographic data and information on sexual harassment indicate that 46% of the women surveyed experienced sexual harassment while working. Results of a survey conducted by the Women's Issues Advisory Committee which confirm these findings are also reported. The need for change in the workplace, based on such data, is discussed. The legal response to sexual harassment is outlined, including the guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Issues which have yet to be clarified by the courts are explored, including the right to sue because of sexual coercion, and the rights and circumstances involved in filing a Title VII claim. The varying roles of counselors in industry are highlighted including those of change agent, educator, and mediator. The need for counselor accountability in order to document the cost benefits of counseling services is discussed and illustrated with anecdotal material. (AG)

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Counseling Perspectives on Sexual Harassment in Industry

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Counseling Perspectives on Sexual Harassment in Industry

Industrial settings have recently acknowledged the debilitating effects of institutional discrimination on productivity and the resulting need for transformations in the quality of people for the assurance of sustained economic growth. The realities of these issues, coupled with the trend in increased participation of women in the workplace, has led industry to focus on the epidemic problem of sexual harassment of employees.

The Working Women's Institute (Note 1) surveyed a small group of women in upstate New York and found 70 percent of the sample had experienced sexual harassment at least once. Supportive evidence (Goodman, 1978; Faucher and McCullock, 1978; Deane and Tiller, 1981) clearly defines this problem as pervasive; one in which tolerating the harassment, or quitting and facing unemployment has often been the only alternative for working women today.

The scope of debilitating consequences for industrial organizations are manifested in psychological stress among workers, low productivity rates, chronic absenteeism as well as placing management in potential violation of civil rights. Therefore, comprehensive alternatives require intervention from psychological, legal socio/cultural as well as educational perspectives.

The counseling profession is well equipped to address these issues and provide those services necessary for productive changes in male-female interations in the workplace. Historically, public and private educational systems have been the primary employers of counseling professionals (Papalia and Kaminski, 1981). In recent years however, an increasing number of counselors have served as counselor/consultants

in industry. Managers are now cognizant of socio-cultural constraints which restrict life choices for any one group of people, but are ill equipped to effectively address such forms of discrimination. This concern is shared by those in the helping profession and is the fundamental impetus from which counseling skills are built. In keeping with this mutual concern, a diverse range of roles are available to the counselor. Acting as an advocate, liaison, therapist and/or trainer, a comprehensive and interdisciplinary service can be utilized to minimize or eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of institutuional discrimination in industry.

Over the past seven years, the authors have served as industrial consultants from their positions as college counselors. What follows is a strategy for utilizing counselors in proactive and reactive roles in mitigating the high social, personal and economic costs of sexual harassment in the workplace.

An Industrial Survey

In an effort to give further perspective to sexual harassment, a survey was conducted with female employees in a large central New York industrial firm. Consent to conduct the survey was conditioned with the request that the firm's name be kept anonymous in any written report.

A total of 135 surveys were distributed to salaried women in the organization. Of the 135 women surveyed, 85 responded for a return rate of 62 percent.

The first phase of the survey collected demographic data on age, marital status and occupational classification. The median age range of the respondents was 26-35. The majority of women were married (69 percent), with 12 percent divorced and 19 percent listed as single.

In terms of occupational classification, 27 percent were listed as professional while 48 percent were designated as secretarial. The remaining respondents were employed as technicians.

The second phase of the survey (Table I) asked the respondents if they had experienced sexual harassment while working. If they responded in the affirmative, a question to indicate severity followed. A concluding question asked respondents to indicate which of seven types of harassment they were subjected to.

Insert Table I about here

The results of this phase indicated that 46 percent have been sexually harassed, which is lower than the number noted by the Working Women's Institute. However, 39 sexually harassed individuals can greatly exacerbate the working relationship between males and females in this particular workplace. The seriousness of this problem was apparent for over half of the respondents who had experienced some form of sexual harassment.

Of the different types of complaints listed, the majority of women experienced unwanted sexual attention from other staff members. This particular form of harassment is not directly connected to an employment decision, but is still considered personally offensive to the individual.

A second type of harrassment involves sexual advances with the stated or implied threat that rejection of such advances will adversely affect the individuals employment (Crane and Tiller, 1981). Eleven percent of the respondents reported being in this situation.

Both forms of harassment reduce an individual's full participation in the workforce by creating a stressful and often intolerable work environment. Comments shared by the respondents reflect the possibility

of such consequences: "...refelction of male insecurity"; "The company is in need of a formal policy for reporting incidents of sexual harassment"; "Unfortunately, the every day minor forms of sexual harassment of women and men is socially accepted in the workplace."

A survey conducted by the Women's Issues Advisory Committee sponsored by United Way of Central New York (Note 1), corraborates the results of this study. Over 64 percent of the women surveyed recognized sexual harassment as a serious problem. One respondent's statement also articulates the need for counselor intervention:

> "Sexual harassment is a big problem for me in my job. For example, the other night I was at the office with my two bosses closing up the place. One of them picked me up and put me in the other one's lap. They are big men. It made me feel very vulnerable and scared even though in my mind I knew they wouldn't hurt me. I also felt very angry at being treated as their plaything. They were laughing and having a good time with me. I felt like if I said something they would have said, 'Oh, come on!, can't you take a joke? Don't you have a sense of humor?' Well, it's not funny to me. They just don't understand. They are both really into power and dominating women." (p.32)

Deane and Tiller (1981) has identified six general responses to sexual harassment, each resulting in negative consequences for women workers and underscores the complexity of this problem: "acquiescing, declining but remaining silent, complaining through internal procedures, claiming unemployment compensation benefits after losing the job, pursuing state legal remedies and filing a federal discrimination charge." (p. 6)

Cleraly, drastic structural and attitudinal change is advocated in the workplace in order to extricate women from this double bind situation.

The Legal Response

Before the industrial counselor can intervene as an effective change

agent, a fundamental understanding of legislation involving sexual harassment issues is necessary.

Although sexual harassment has been documented as a problem faced by employed women as early as colonial times (Bularzik, 1978), it was not considered a violation of human rights until 1964, under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. While this has substantiated such conduct as a discriminatory act, it has only been since 1980 that the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provided the first official guidelines on sexual harassment. The guidelines have not only expedited complaint procedures, and provided protection from retaliation in the workplace once a complaint has been initiated, but the cost to employers can be high if they fail to deal appropriately with a case of sexual harassment when it has been brought to their attention.

The EEOC's-guidelines define sexual harassment as follows:

1. "Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of an individuals employment.

2. Submission to, or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or

3. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment." (Dean and Tiller, 1981, p. 12)

An understanding of the implications resulting from this recent legislation has served two functions: 1) industrial settings are now encouraged to establish preventive measures in hopes of avoiding litigation. Currently, industries can expect to incur an average of $40,000 to $50,000 in legal fees, time, investigation and loss of productivity from decreased morale. 2) Women experiencing sexual harassment will be afforded increased assurance of civil rights protection as legislation

becomes more stringently enforced.

"Courts will also continue to hold employers strictly liable for acts of their supervisors when sexual harassment takes the form of a 'put-out-or-get-out' coercion." However, in harassment cases that involve sexual annoyance, and are not directly related to job security, "courts are more reluctant to hold an employer liable for a supervisor's misconduct." (Note 3)

Legislation of behavior continues to open up new avenues of contention as it strives toward equity and non-discrimination. Waks (1982), supports this view as he notes that "...a period of fine-tuning lies ahead for sexual harassment law." To exemplify the tenuous position of Title VII, the following issues are related, which are yet to be clarified by the courts:

- "Whether a person who receives tangible job benefits for acceding to sexual coercion can later sue for damages.
- Whether an employee who was passed over in favor of a co-worker who acceded to sexual harassment can file a Title VII claim.
- Whether a worker who voluntarily engages in a liason with a supervisor and then backs out can later claim sexual harassment if the supervisor resorts to retaliation on the job." (Note 4)

Due to the complexities of these issues it is concluded that major changes in eliminating sexual harassment require alternative interventions such as preventive strategies that extend beyond the confines of jurisprudence.

Applied Counseling Skills to Industry

The need for industrial counselors has in part been precipitated by the needs of personnel employers. Personnel managers in industry are delegated with the responsibility of maintaining and developing proper hiring practices. In this role, they are increasingly confronted

with personnel problems associated with sexual harassment issues. Although their expertise lies in the enforcement of pertinent affirmative action and non-discrimination regulations, they are often unprepared to deal with the personal and emotional problems of women faced with sexual harassment. Access to industrial counselors has thus become an important factor in attending to the issues and personal dynamics of human resource development.

Essential to any successful counseling role in industry is trust and acceptance from top management. The role of an outside consultant allows one to establish an identity apart from management and to be more approachable in confronting a sensitive issue such as sexual harassment. A useful strategy has been to approach clients in their work setting in contrast to a formal office arrangement. When the need for privacy arises a number of settings could be mutually selected by the counselor and client.

The community mental health approach as supported by Werner (1978) has expanded the professional roles of counselors, and has pointed out the great extent to which a counselor can intervene in the social and situational aspects of the environment. With respect to sexual harassment, the counselor can modify his traditional role as a one-to-one therapist to act as a change agent in implementing relevant industrial policy statements, as an educator in sensitizing individuals to the problems of sexual harassment, and/or mediate in facilitating communication for informal resolution of harassment complaints. Thus, the multifaceted nature of the counseling profession equips the counselor to take on a leadership role in prevention activities. Intervention can also be made in the form or remedial action on the industrial structures that continue to support or create sex discrimination problems for its employees.

The eclectic approach of many counselors today promote the use of a multitude of theories and techniques depending on situational constraints, client needs and outcomes desired. Industrial settings, while supportive of human resource services and individual needs, require those skills which result in maintaining a balance between resources (input) and productivity (output) of which the outcome is maximization of profits.

As a means to dovetail counselor goals and outcomes with this mission, counselors can successfully provide problem-solving skills and infuse direct counseling with functional goals that are cost-efficient. As Akabas and Akabas (1982) point out, "rather than looking for undefinable long-term 'well-being,' the helping professional and employee consider options for solving specific functional problems." (p. 18)

Senour (1982) also describes two divergent approaches to counseling in terms of "action" and "insight" therapies, one being more adaptable to an industrial setting than the other. According to Senour (1982), insight therapists are concerned with the broader issues of life while circumventing the immediate problems for the development of self-insight, as found in client-centered aproaches. Action therapists on the other hand, deal with specific and immediate issues in their client's lives, and tend to incorporate cognitive and behavioral approaches. (p. 348)

With this distinction in mind, action oriented counselors are able to facilitate the prevention and remediation of problems associated with sexual harassment, while achieving the final outcomes desired by industrial settings.

Research seems to support the correlation of sexual harassment behavior to learned role models of genders (Deane and Tiller, 1981).

To establish new gender roles within the context of productive male-female working relationships, overt influence on the counselor's part is needed to direct appropriate behavioral responses. This can be achieved through case study analyses that "put the victim-harasser problem into the employer-liability framework" (Deane and Tiller, p. 49), and provides a context that is more amenable for attitudinal and behavioral change. This strategy is one example of action oriented intervention and provides cost benefits to industry through the utilization of preventive rather than legal measures.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the development of appropriate gender roles raises not only the achieved status of women, but also provides new avenues to change a woman's ascribed status of which she justifiably feels she has no control over. As Rosenthal (1974) elaborates, "One of the most painful personal situations occurs for women when they achieve recognition for accomplishments that are highly valued by society, but are still treated as inferior because of ascribed status." (p. 182)

A Need for Accountability

As emphasized earlier, while some industries may be altrustic in nature and support counseling services without a solid rationale, most organizations require some form of accountability based on cost effectiveness. The following authentic vignettes provide a framework by which a counselor may document his services resulting in cost benefits to industry.

A female employee was sexually harassed by her male supervisor. On the promise of accelerated advancement a sexual relationship was initiated. A subsequent pregnancy and abortion followed. The relation-

ship was resumed a second time with a resulting second pregnancy. Following a spontaneous abortion, the young woman became distraught, depressed, and threatened suicide after being rejected by her supervisor.

At the time of suicidal ideations, the client called the counselor. After a period of crisis intervention, the counselor and client worked through a strategy. The client refused to report the incident to management. An on-going counseling relationsh p was established and the counselor was able to arrange for the client to be transfered to a comparable position elsewhere in the organization. Management accepted the request for transfer without an explanation on the recommendation from the counselor that a clear and present danger existed to several employees and there existed the potential of a liability suit to the company.

The cost benefits to the corporation were substantial. The replacement cost of the two employees to the company would have been $4,000 to $5,000. One could extimate that a liability suit of $50,000 or more was averted.

A woman engineer was the leader of one of three groups working jointly on a research and development project. The input of her analytical group would have significant impact on the quality of the new product. She was told by the two male group leaders that they were not comfortable working with a woman and that she need not expect that her contributions would be taken seriously. A competent engineer was being harassed on the basis of her sexuality. She contacted the counselor after experiencing depressions and sudden bouts of tearfulness on a daily basis.

With the support of the counselor, she chose to confront the situation in a scheduled meeting with her supervisor. The supervisor was supportive and took decisive action in helping to resolve the situation.

A productive and talented female engineer with five years of experience stayed with the organization. Replacing her would have cost the organization a minimum of $8,000 in agency fees. The net result would have been a new employee and a significant loss in the experience level of the employee.

A final illustration of the effective use of counseling skills in industrial sexual harassment involves a homosexual encounter between two females. Two young women working in the same facility established friendly ties. After a period of time one of the young women sexually propositioned her friend. The woman approached for a homosexual relationship reacted emotionally and hysterically to the situation. She complained bitterly to management and threatened physical violence to her former friend. She began claiming she was too emotionally distraught to work and began to call in sick or would leave work in the middle of the day, claiming she was to angry or upset to work.

The organization had not previously experienced such an open encounter. Reactions ranged from a plan to quietly layoff the person initiating the homosexual encounter to an outright confrontation and termination. The matter was a topic of discussion not only for local management, but was taken to corporate headquarters.

The situation was referred to the counselor/consultant who recommended that a counseling encounter with each of the parties should take place before any action be taken or any decision made. Both parties responded to the counseling approach and the situation was structured and diffused. Neither employee was lost to the organization and both were able to remain with the organization.

The cost benefit to the organization was approximately $4,000 in fees in not having to replace two valued technicians. The absentee rate of the offended party was resolved. Assuming a daily rate of $50 a day was earned, the organization was saved several hundred dollars of needless sick leave time.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment in industry appears to be well documented. The onset of recent legislation and court decisions suggested that industries and their employees face increased liability for ignoring, tolerating, or supporting sexual harassment.

The need for an expanded role in industry by counselors is strongly in evidence. Counselors have the resources and skills to serve as interventionists and change agents in helping industries and their employees deal effectively with sexual harassment. To accomplish this role, counselors must assume a more action and results oriented stance. Of critical importance in making an impact on sexual harassment in the work place, is the need for counselors to demonstrate accountability; accountability in terms of substantial savings of money and human resources that will accrue to industry in effectively utilizing the counselor in an expanded role model. Intervention in these areas will also serve to develop a new set of norms and role expectations for male/female workers in the work setting. As a result, the promotion of genuine comradeship and mutual cooperation will be enhanced regardless of sex differentiations.

TABLE I

Experience with Sexual Harassment (Phase II)

	No. of Responses		No. of Responses		No. of Responses
Have you experienced sexual harassment while working?			Do you consider the matter serious?		What types of harassment did you experience?
N=85	Yes	39 (46)*	N=39	Yes 22 (56)	N=39
	No	45 (54)		No 14 (37)	Suggestive remarks about your body 29 (74)
				No Response 3 (7)	Degrading comments, jokes 26 (67)
					Sexual contact 10 (26)
					Suggestive pictures considered offensive 9 (23)
					Sexual threats 2 (5)
					Promises of promotion for sexual favors 1 (3)
					Sexual relations 1 (3)

* Note: number in parentheses indicate percentages of response items

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